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FOR U/S BURNS AND U/S FORE FROM AMBASSADOR DERSE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [AMGT](#) [PREL](#) [CVIS](#) [IR](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: GLOBAL REPOSITIONING: BAKU-BASED IRAN WATCHER

REF: STATE 49458

¶1. As requested reftel, I offer Embassy Baku's views on the Baku-based Iran Watcher position, 67700005. Our responses are keyed to reftel questions.

¶A. The new Iran Watcher position has increased our ability to report on Iranian activities in Azerbaijan, including Iranian efforts to influence Azerbaijani foreign policy as well as the activities of the Iranian diaspora community. The position also has enabled us to increase reporting on internal Iranian developments, particularly among Iran's sizable ethnic Azerbaijani minority.

¶B. As in any start-up position, a significant amount of time was needed to establish the administrative details for this regional position, as well as the contact base necessary for Iran-focused reporting. During the incumbent's first nine months on the job, we have increased our reporting on Iran-related issues. By the end of the current fiscal year, we hope to produce several in-depth analytical pieces on the overall Iranian presence in Azerbaijan.

¶C. The position has not been used for any other purposes, although the incumbent has volunteered to serve on the Board of our Employee Association and the Eligible Family Member hiring committee. We are grateful for his service to the community.

¶D. Our ability to reach out to the Iranian diaspora community in Baku is limited by the lack of Iranian visa processing in Baku. We believe that adding Iranian visa processing (once we have the space to do so in a New Embassy Compound) would increase our ability to develop new Iranian contacts and hence increase the quantity and quality of our reporting. Separately, thanks to IIP's Iranian Outreach Program, we are exploring PD programs that will include Iranian audiences. If these programs are successful, we believe that additional Iranian-focused PD programming also could increase our ability to reach out to the Iranian community and hence improve our reporting. Finally, we note that we currently are using EUR-funded LES staff to support this NEA position (including interpretation and translation services, as well as assistance in scheduling meetings). The diversion of EUR-funded LES to support this new Iran Watcher position has reduced our ability to promote equally important transformational diplomacy goals in Azerbaijan, particularly in the area of democratic reform. We strongly urge the Department to consider providing funding for a new, NEA-funded LES position to support the Iran Watcher.

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